DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 884 52 IR 002 594

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TITLE The Library Advisory Committee. Public Library Training Institutes, Library Service Guide No. 29.
INSTITUTION Morehead State Univ., Ky. Appalachian Adult Education Center.
SPONS AGENCY Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Jul 75
GRANT OEG-0-73-5341
NOTE 28p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Guides; Adults; *Advisory Committees; Community Influence; *Community Involvement; Disadvantaged Groups; *Guidelines; Library Programs; *Public Libraries; Selection
IDENTIFIERS AAEC; *Appalachian Adult Education Center

ABSTRACT

As part of a series on library services to disadvantaged adults, this pamphlet provides guidelines for the use of community advisory committees in libraries: the duties and capabilities of such committees, their influence on the library, and their relationships with library boards. The size and composition of the committee are considered, as are four alternatives for the selection of members: election by the community, or appointment by the librarian, by organizations, or by public officials. In the final section, steps are outlined for writing policy, training members, and beginning the work of the advisory committee. A brief reading list is appended. (SL)

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LIBRARY SERVICE GUIDES

THE LIBRARY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Appalachian Adult Education Center

IR 008 594

APPALACHIAN ADULT EDUCATION CENTER

Public Library Training Institutes
Library Service Guide No. 29

THE LIBRARY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

by

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Appalachian Adult Education Center
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July, 1975

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Preface

This guide is one of a series on library services to disadvantaged adults. The purpose of the series is to explore alternative ways public libraries can expand services to this special group.

Each guide attempts to recognize the differences among public library budgets, staff size and training, and the differences among the communities libraries serve. Each guide deals with a particular service and, where possible, suggests several alternative ways the library can provide that service to disadvantaged adults. The library, then, can and should further adapt the suggestions to fit the resources and needs of its local community.

The guides combine (1) a thorough search of the library literature; (2) the knowledge of professional librarians, who wrote many of the guides and evaluated the entire series; and (3) the experience of the Appalachian Adult Education Center (AAEC) in designing interagency educational programs for disadvantaged adults.

The AAEC has worked with state, regional, and local public libraries in seven states in projects funded by the Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources of the U.S. Office of Education. In one project, four urban and three rural centers demonstrated ways public libraries and adult basic education programs could improve their services to disadvantaged adults by coordinating efforts in reader guidance, recruitment, library orientation, community referral, and in the selection, use, and delivery of materials. The AAEC also conducted institutes in local public libraries in seven states in designing and implementing library services for disadvantaged adults.

Work on those and other projects led to three conclusions, upon which the guides are based: (1) that undereducated adults need information and services to help solve problems; (2) that the public library can meet those needs through adjustments in procedures and interagency cooperation; and (3) that the materials and services required for disadvantaged adults are useful and useable to all adults.

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DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Advisory

In a true *advisory* committee, the participants' advice must receive serious consideration at the level where final decisions are made. Everyone has the right to give advice, but membership on an advisory committee means that the participant is involved in a specific organized process, and that the participant must be heard.

Community

A community is a group that occupies the same physical environment within distinguishable geographical boundaries, that shares common needs, and that consciously thinks of itself as a community.

Community, as used here, means all of the individual people, organizations, institutions, agencies, and groups in the library's service area.

INTRODUCTION

To develop truly effective services for the disadvantaged, or for any group, the library must look to the community it seeks to serve for advice and help in developing, expanding, and improving its services. The library must be involved with the needs, problems, and issues of concern to the community. The community must be involved in the library's planning, developing, and implementing of services.

Levels of Community Involvement

Community involvement in the library can occur on at least three levels; community representatives can

- give advice to the library
- participate in decision-making, and
- take part in implementing services.

This guide is concerned with the first level of community involvement—the giving of advice to the library through a library advisory committee.

The Library Advisory Committee

An advisory committee is a human pipeline, bringing the life of the community into the library. The advisory committee may not be the most scientific way to "know" the community, but it may be the most practical and useful way to determine

community needs. It does not require specialized staff or time and money for surveys. It does require a carefully thought out plan for (1) deciding the duties and responsibilities of the committee; (2) establishing its authority and relationship to the library board; (3) determining the best methods for selecting, orienting, and training its members; and (4) helping the committee begin its work.

This Guide

This guide offers help to the library in developing such a plan by suggesting some possible answers to the following questions:

(1) What does an advisory committee do?

(2) How much influence will the advisory committee have?

(3) Who makes up the advisory committee?

(4) How will committee members be selected? and

(5) Where does an advisory committee begin?

WHAT DOES AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE DO?

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The purpose of the library advisory committee should be clear to the librarian, the board of directors or trustees, and to the library staff before the committee begins its work.

The major purposes of the advisory committee are (1) to interpret community needs for information and services to the library, and (2) to interpret the library to the community.

The advisory committee serves as a link between the library and its constituents—the non-users as well as the users.

Through the advisory committee, information about significant developments in the community can flow into the library. The library will get first-hand knowledge for developing collections and services in response to real community needs.

Members of the committee, in turn, are exposed to the budget, staff, resource, and survival problems of the library. They often become leaders in developing broader community understanding and support for the library.

Information about the Community

The advisory committee informs the library about

* the community's perception of the library
* the community's expectations from the library
* issues of importance to the community, and
* changes in the community—in schools, housing, industry, services, government agencies, and local organizations

Information about the Library

In addition to providing the library with information about the community, the advisory committee also provides the library a mechanism for

* informing different parts of the community about library services
* interpreting the goals and purposes of the library
* sharing library operational and budget problems, and
* organizing community support for the library

Duties and Responsibilities of the Advisory Committee

To form an effective committee, and to limit confusion and friction among its members and with the library administration, the duties and responsibilities of the library advisory committee should be clearly stated.

A committee with purposes like those listed above might adopt a list of duties and responsibilities like the following:

(1) To advise the library on needed services and needed expansion or adjustment in services to meet the needs of different client groups in the community.

(2) To channel community complaints about existing library services, facilities, and materials to the library administration in an organized way, along with recommendations for corrective action.

(3) To channel to the library administration information on important changes occurring and proposed in the community, with recommendations for a library role or position when appropriate.

(4) To channel to the library information on changes in the purposes, officers, personnel, and policies of community groups, organizations, and agencies.

(5) To channel to the library information on current issues of importance to the community, with recommendations for a library role or position when appropriate.

(6) To interpret library goals, policies, and procedures to the community.

(7) To convey information on library budget and operational problems to the community.

(8) To assist in organizing community support for the library.

HOW MUCH INFLUENCE WILL THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE HAVE ?

The Role of the Committee in Decision-Making

How much influence the committee actually has in carrying out its duties and responsibilities depends on the attitude of the library administration. Advisory committees exist to give advice, but it is those who receive the advice who determine the weight of the committee's decisions.

Questions to Consider

The following are some of the kinds of questions that are likely to arise in regard to the degree of power the advisory committee will have. Possible answers to these questions should be considered before the committee begins its work.

* *In channeling community complaints, will the committee determine which complaints are worthy of discussion?*
* *In recommending changes, will the committee be encouraged to develop written recommendations?*
* *Will the library's concern for neutrality (perhaps necessary for its survival) discourage it from fulfilling a committee recommendation to provide objective information on a controversial issue?*

- *Will there be a standard procedure for reporting the community's perception of the library to the administration?*

- *Will the committee be encouraged to produce recommendations to the administration for reordering priorities and reconsidering policies and programs?*

The Committee and the Library Board

The role of the advisory committee in relation to the board of directors or trustees must also be clear from the beginning.

The board is usually accountable for the proper use of public funds. The advisory committee is the direct link to the community. The adivsory committee, then, should be viewed as a way for the library to be accountable to the community it is funded to serve.

To avoid conflict between the advisory committee and the board, certain rules of the game should be agreed upon at the outset. The library administration and trustees must decide whether they truly desire to get community advice before inviting people to sit on an advisory committee. If they do desire advice, planned methods of responding to that advice must be structured and written down. The advisory committee members will go away if the administration does not respond to their advice. Too often "advisory committees" are really only token public relations devices. The library should ask for advice only if it really wants it and plans to react to it. It may either act upon the committee's advice, or reject it, but it must respond in some way. If the administration and trustees are unable to act upon the advisory committee's advice, they should promptly communicate their constraints in writing to prevent misunderstandings.

Perhaps the mere introduction of a problem by the committee should mean that the administration must develop a response.

A discretionary fund in the budget might be set aside for urgent projects identified by the advisory committee, with the committee having the final decision on which projects to fund with the money.

If at all possible, staff support for the committee—an administrative assistant, secretarial help, telephones, and some office space—would enable the committee to work more efficiently and effectively.

The degree of the library's commitment to community involvement can be measured by the visible ways it assists the advisory committee in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities.

A tone of mutual respect and trust can and should prevail between the advisory committee and the library administration. An adversary relationship is a waste of everyone's time. Disagreements are bound to occur, but they can and must be dealt with in the most positive and productive ways possible.

WHO MAKES UP THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE?

A Balancing of Input

Effective library policies and services result from a balancing of input from the community. Each of the following should be represented on the advisory committee:

(1) the professional and nonprofessional library staff;

(2) the library's official policy-makers;

(3) local elected officials;

(4) local appointed officials;

(5) organized community groups;

(6) community groups that are not organized;

(7) agency personnel and other professionals who work in the community; and

(8) all of the geographical areas served by the library.

The Professional and Non-professional Library Staff

The library staff, both professional and nonprofessional, develops and implements programs to meet the community's needs. The library staff is the primary source of information about the library's capabilities.

The administration, for example, might ask the library staff to analyze a recommendation of the advisory committee. The staff might conclude that the scope of the project would be too demanding on the current library budget and staff. It might then recommend a similar but more limited project, addressing the need but within the library's present capabilities. Or the staff might ask the administration to reorder priorities so that the advisory committee's recommendation might be carried out in full at the expense of some less important library function.

All the members of the library staff, both professional and nonprofessional, should be members of the advisory committee.

The Library Board

The library board (or other official policy-making body) is likely to include community leaders who bring administrative skills and political know-how to the library, qualities that are essential for continuing public support. Such leaders often have access to media, to elected officials, and to other community leaders, resources that can be important assets to the library's work.

Local Elected Officials

Local elected officials are a direct link to the library's source of financial support. They control local funds, and the way they budget those funds expresses their priorities in a very specific way. The presence of elected officials on the committee gives them the opportunity to witness the involvement of community residents (their constituents) with the library. Their presence also gives the committee an opportunity to present community needs—including needs for expanded library services—to people with the power to do something about them.

Local Appointed Officials

Local appointed officials—representing educational, cultural, religious, labor, economic, voluntary, and social service organizations—can provide links to all kinds of community services. They are sources of valuable information and services which can flow into the community as more people learn of their availability through the advisory committee. And these officials can learn directly of the community's needs so that the library can develop programs in response.

Representatives of Organized Community Groups

Carefully selected representatives from organized community groups can speak for particular segments of the population. Through them the library can learn of the needs and expectations of the groups they represent.

A foreign language-speaking group, for example, might not use a branch library because it has few materials available in their language. A senior citizen's group may need large print materials. These groups may see the library as unresponsive to their needs. Having representatives of these groups on the advisory committee can help the library and the community in solving these problems.

Representatives of Non-Organized Community Groups

Representatives from important publics in the community that are not organized can give the library the only means it has of learning about the needs of people who have no organized way of speaking in their own behalf. Through these representatives, the library can reach the large part of the community which does not use the library—the powerless people who have little or no representation in government, but who have the greatest needs. These people include minorities, the unemployed, the handicapped, youth—both advantaged and disadvantaged, welfare recipients, and other groups who do not usually know about available services and organizations. Representatives of these groups on the advisory committee can express their needs and grievances, enabling the library to respond with appropriate services. Without their representation, the library has no real way of discovering their needs.

Representatives of Community Agencies

Representatives of community agencies and others who work in the community provide a direct link between the library and other community services. They can help the library assess community problems in light of their clients' needs and make recommendations for action. Their presence on the advisory committee also opens the door to possibilities for interagency cooperation among the library and the agencies represented—to share information and resources toward common goals. Agency administrators, practitioners, and clients should be included.

Representatives from all Geographic Areas in the Community

The advisory committee should include at least one representative from each distinct geographic area in the area the library serves. Some parts of the city or some rural communities may not be receiving or using library services. A representative of each geographic area on the advisory committee can help the library reach presently unreached or under-served areas.

The Size of the Advisory Committee

The advisory committee should be kept to a manageable size, but all its members will seldom be present at the same time. Sometimes members must be approached individually by the administration on matters about which they are knowledgeable. Wide representation on the committee is more important than its size.

HOW WILL COMMITTEE MEMBERS BE SELECTED?

Methods of Selection

Representatives to the library advisory committee can be selected in several ways, by:

(1) appointment by the head librarian;

(2) appointment by organizations;

(3) appointment by public officials;

(4) election by the community; or

(5) a combination of appointment and election.

The Search

A search for possible committee members should identify the agencies and individuals in the community who represent the eight categories which will make up the committee: the library staff, library policy makers, elected officials, appointed officals, organized and non-organized community groups, community service personnel, and representatives of all geographic areas. The library must reach out to discover who the opinion leaders are in the various groups in the community.

The search program must be well publicized to be successful—particularly in neighborhoods where people are not organized and are poorly served by government. Voluntary and public agencies, churches, and other

organizations familiar with the community can help in this process at the neighborhood level.

First Contacts

Once identified, every contact on the list should be informed of the development of the advisory committee and the need to identify potential nominees. This contact could be by telephone, visit, letter, at meetings, through third parties, or by a combination of these methods.

Profiles of Nominees

Profiles of the recommended nominees should be prepared, giving information such as the nominee's district of residency, ethnicity, education, sex, age, means of income, work affiliation, community, group affiliation, prior community involvement, and other factors which would identify the group a nominee would represent and his or her other qualities for leadership.

A Comparison of Selection Methods

The following chart compares the five alternative methods listed above for selecting advisory committee members: (1) appointment by the head librarian; (2) appointment by organizations; (3) appointment by public officials; (4) election by the community; and (5) combined appointment and election. The chart compares the composition, appointment processes, elective processes, and probable effectiveness of each method.

ALTERNATIVES FOR SELECTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

METHOD	COMPOSITION	APPOINTMENT PROCESSES	ELECTIVE PROCESSES	EFFECTIVENESS
Appointment by the head librarian	All members appointed by the head librarian with representation from each of the eight suggested sources.	Appointment by the head librarian from a pool of persons nominated by organized groups and the community, or appointment by random selection from the total community or from library users.	No members elected.	This is the fastest process, and will be accepted in most communities for the initial formation of an advisory committee.
Appointment by organizations	All positions filled by appointees of organized groups.	The library acknowledges the appointed members by the recognized organizations.	The group might elect a representative from their membership.	The librarian and the public must depend on the quality of appointees chosen by organized groups.
Appointment by public officials	Positions filled by appointees of public officials.	The library acknowledges the appointed members by public officials.	No members elected.	Persons and groups who already have input and power will gain more control.
Election by the community	All members elected but in accordance with a plan to guarantee representation from important segments of the community.	No members appointed.	Elected by all residents, eighteen and above, to insure representation from all geographical areas and age groups.	This is a complex and expensive process worthwhile only when community interest demands it. Apathy may lead to limited participation, or highly organized groups may dominate the process and consolidate control.

METHOD	COMPOSITION	APPOINTMENT PROCESSES	ELECTIVE PROCESSES	EFFECTIVENESS
Combined appointment and election	One third of members appointed by organizations and public officials; one third appointed by the head librarian; one third elected from among community nominees in convention-style elections.	Organizations and public officials would be invited to fill one third of the seats. From among nominees and personal choices, the head librarian would appoint one third with the opportunity to use the power of his/her position to achieve a balance.	One third of the members would be elected in a convention type election where all interested persons would be invited to appear to cast their vote for persons nominated by the public but not appointed by the head librarian.	This method is probably least vulnerable to criticism and less expensive than an at-large election. It allows for a balance of power.

WHERE DOES AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE BEGIN?

A Written Statement

Information about the new advisory committee--its purposes, duties and responsibilities, composition, selection of members and chairperson, library staff support, frequency of meetings, expense reimbursement, contact persons, and anything else the committee or the community needs to know—should be put in writing.

This document would establish a model for the committee to follow as it begins its work. It is important that all its responsibilities, the limits of its authority, and its relationship to the library administration are clearly defined. A suggested format for its meetings should also be provided, although this, like other aspects of the committee, should remain open to change.

An Interim Committee

To iron out the problems of the committee's specific duties, degree of power, selection of members, and ways of working, it may be best to first set up a temporary committee. This interim committee would test the best ways of selecting members and of working with the library and the community. The permanent committee could then be formed, based on the knowledge gained through the workings of the interim committee.

Initial appointments to the committee can be for six-month terms, during which the methods of appointment to the permanent committee can be worked out, staff support established, and other issues resolved. It is important to clarify at the outset the functions of the interim committee and to set up timetables for the formation of the permanent committee. One function of an interim committee might be to recommend a slate for permanent appointment.

The Committee Chairperson

Whether the chairperson is to be appointed, selected by the committee, or the chair passed around, should be decided immediately, and probably should be the will of the group.

Staggering Appointments

Participation on the advisory committee may have certain benefits, such as prestige and important contacts, for some of its members, but those benefits should not be allowed to interfere with the primary purpose of the committee. The perpetuation of the committee as an entity should never become more important than the committee's role in providing service to the community.

Stipulations or clauses to limit the number of years a member may serve on a committee can counteract this tendency toward isolated, irrelevant self-perpetuation. Staggering appointments also prevents the development of self-serving power groups. It allows some new people, with fresh ideas and attitudes, to come on to the committee each year. On the other hand, it may also have the effect of barring an enthusiastic and helpful worker from continuing on the committee over time.

Orientation and Training

A new structure which brings together for the first time people of diverse backgrounds and interests cannot be effective unless its members are given a good orientation and training for their job.

New members will need orientation to the purposes of the committee and training in the structure, functions, funding, budgeting, and decision-making processes of the library. The orientation and training should be planned before the appointment of the interim committee. The head librarian might conduct the training, or invite a consultant. The person(s) offering the training should be well-respected, to emphasize the importance of the advisory committee's work.

SUGGESTED READINGS

"Human Resources District Councils: Framework for Citizen Action."

The manual for establishing local advisory committees for Human Resource Districts in New York City. Detailed information on the process of establishing advisory committees.

"HRA Advisory Council, Formation, Set A & B."

Follow-up questionnaires on the status of formation of advisory councils.

O'Donnel, Edward J. and Catherine S. Chilman, "Poor People on Public Welfare Boards and Committees: Participation in Policy-Making," *Welfare in Review* (June, 1969) pp. 1-29.

Owens, Major R. "HRA Citizen Participation Instruments and Methods (draft)." New York. Community Development Agency. n.d. 28 pp.

Owens, Major R. "Ways of Implementing Social Policy to Ensure Maximum Public Participation and Social Justice for Minorities." New York, n.p. 1972.

LIBRARY SERVICE GUIDES

1. Materials Selection for Disadvantaged Adults
2. Assessing Community Information and Service Needs
3. Using Pamphlets with Disadvantaged Adults
4. Deposit Collections of Special Materials for Disadvantaged Adults
5. Utilizing Volunteers in Expanding Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
6. Books By Mail Services: Moving the Library to Disadvantaged Adults
7. Evening and Weekend Library Services for Disadvantaged Adults
8. The Library as a Community Information and Referral Center
9. Planning the Expansion of Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
10. Working with Library Trustees to Expand Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
11. Reader Guidance Services for Disadvantaged Adults
12. The Recruitment of Disadvantaged Adults: Effective Publicity
13. Conducting Tours to the Library for Groups of Disadvantaged Adults
14. ABE—What Is It?
15. The Relationship of Disadvantagement to Library Services
16. In-service Training of Personnel to Serve Disadvantaged Adults
17. Adult Education in the Library: ABE, GED, CLEP, and the Open University
18. Book Talks: Encouraging Library Materials Usage by Disadvantaged Adults
19. Techniques for Teachers: Teaching the Application of Basic Skills to Everyday Life Problems
20. Displaying Materials for Disadvantaged Adults
21. Bookmobile Services: Moving the Library to Disadvantaged Adults
22. Expanding Library Services to the Elderly
23. Using Audiovisuals With Disadvantaged Adults
24. Expanding Library Services to the Institutionalized
25. Interagency Cooperation: The Public Library and Agencies that Serve Disadvantaged Adults
26. Adjusting School Libraries for Use by Disadvantaged Adults
27. Speakers Bureaus for Disadvantaged Adults
28. Maintaining Separate Collections of Library Materials for Disadvantaged Adults
29. Client Participation in Expanding Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
30. The Role of the College Library in the Education of Disadvantaged Adults
31. Public Library Services to Young Disadvantaged Adults
32. Working with Elected Officials to Expand Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults

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The work presented in this document was performed pursuant to a grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources [OEG-0-73-5341]. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Office of Education, but are the sole responsibility of the Appalachian Adult Education Center.